

  
Motion: OTPA S02-II-V2  
October 13, 2004 – Planning Commissioner Ken Lawrence

Mr. Chairman, I have motions to make on a controversial case. I feel that some preamble to the motions is needed. I ask your indulgence for that purpose.

First of all, I want to thank all those many people who have provided public input on this matter. I am sorry that there was no way to acknowledge and respond to individual comments and suggestions. But I can tell you that all were welcome, and I hope you can see your thoughts in some of the changes made to the proposal.

Second, I'd like to add my personal thanks to two people who were standouts at the July Planning Commission public hearing on this case – Officers Carolyn Jackson and Jamshid Fakhary. Our Chairman has written a letter describing what they did that night. I want to add my own thanks in this way for their exemplary performance of duty. Well done, both.

We are charged with the responsibility of making a recommendation for an out-of-turn amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. The amendment would provide an option for a Metrorail-oriented development of the former Fairlee site, a subdivision immediately adjoining the Vienna Metro station. The land has been more or less cleared and is currently vacant, can be developed by-right at a low density via an administrative process or could be rezoned to a density in conformance with the current Comprehensive Plan following public hearings before the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. But tonight's action is on the Planning Commission recommendation on a proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Plan, to allow for the Metrorail-oriented option. Following our recommendation, the plan amendment will next move to the Board of Supervisors for a further public hearing and final decision.

A first principle in land use planning in Fairfax County is to assume the reality of continued population growth. In 1960, the population of our County was about 249 thousand. By the year 2020, the predicted population is something over 1.23 million, about five times the 1960 number. The county population has grown, is growing and will continue to grow as long as our economy continues to grow. The question is not whether, but to what degree.

In the years from 1960 to the present, our County's land area has not grown one square foot. In 1960, the distribution of people across land was about one per acre; by 2020 there will be about 5 people per acre of land. We grow thicker on the ground. This will continue.

From its beginnings as a farm area, our County has been transformed. In the years following World War II, Fairfax County became a suburban "bedroom community" for

people working mostly in the District of Columbia and its close-in surroundings. But in a second wave of transformation, our County acquired its own “downtown”: Tyson’s Corner, and it acquired such a significant number of employment centers that now, nearly half of Fairfax County residents work in the county. This second wave of transformation occurred primarily due to changes in the federal employment and contracting markets. Decisions made by Fairfax County during the 1960s – including approval of the “Western Plan,” enactment of a standard one-house-per-acre zoning district for most of the County, and the decision to extend sewer capacity – ensured that Fairfax County’s days as a primarily agricultural community were numbered. During the late 1970s and 1980s Fairfax County land use policy focused on maximizing commercial development to improve the tax base, but without a commensurate increase in plans for residential development – thereby guaranteeing Level of Service F for many of our major roads as people living in other jurisdictions compete with Fairfax County residents for valuable roadway space, and commute to Fairfax County jobs.

These transforming forces have severely impacted a road network that was laid out in our more bucolic and suburban days. That condition, plus the growth of multiple-job and multiple-car households, has produced a dubious distinction for our region: we are now third in the nation for road congestion.

If it is true that growth will continue on a fixed amount of land, and also true that our traditional dependence on cars and roads for transport is approaching its limits, then the pattern of this continued growth *must* be changed from what it has been in the past. We must plan our growth in such a way that as we continue to get thicker on the ground, we will not simply go on adding households full of people who depend on cars to get around. We must change the paradigm of our growth.

In 1990, the county Board of Supervisors put in place a policy for such a change. The Board provided for higher density and intensity of land use in the immediate vicinity of transit stations. The concept is that residents who live near Metro stops can use Metro rather than a car to get to work, provided that their workplaces are also near Metro. For example, many major Federal employment centers are near Metro stops, and Federal employees make up about half of Metro commuters.

The present proposal to amend the Master Plan flows from this policy. Over the last few years, such developments have been planned and built in various places across the country. The term “transit oriented development”, abbreviated as “TOD”, has been coined as a shorthand reference for this way of handling growth.

Those who can recall the days before and just after World War II will be quick to point out that there is more old than new in this strategy. When fewer people had cars, and more people lived in clusters rather than spread out in now-traditional suburbs, transit was a natural way to do local travel. Buses and light rail systems were commonplace and widely used. Cities like New York and Boston had heavy rail transit as well. Then

came the mass postwar movement to the suburbs, and in many locations the decline of transit use, as low density car-dependent suburbs were built out.

Fairfax County is now mostly built out. The rail transit stops we presently have are in established neighborhoods. The area around the former Fairlee subdivision is such a neighborhood. For us, transit oriented development is transit oriented redevelopment. The nodal points of density and intensity must be inserted into a built environment, not created in green fields. As called for in Fairfax County's Residential Development Criteria in the Policy portion of the Comprehensive Plan, "Developments should fit into the fabric of their adjacent neighborhoods."

Tonight's case exemplifies that situation. The Board sponsored this nomination because individual land holdings have been consolidated into a single piece of land that immediately adjoins the Vienna Metro station, and is also large enough to accommodate the numbers and mixes of units and uses that function together in a TOD.

But this growth strategy, applied in built out surroundings, does produce local impact. In the process of public hearings on the proposed Plan amendment, numerous issues were raised, most having to do with this local impact. Consideration of these issues has continued over many months, and has included, in addition to the regular process for such work, the creation of an informal citizen group that devoted intense efforts to the task of enumerating and working issues. The approach employed was to analyze potential development at this site at the level of detail that would normally be involved after planning is complete, that is, at the time of a request for rezoning. Prospective developers of the site produced a notional design for the purpose, and county staff provided analysis. As a result, there are issues identified by the work group and from public comments that are not relevant to the plan amendment, but will be considered at rezoning. Those issues bearing on planning – that is, issues relating to land use, density and the like - are reflected in the many changes to the draft plan text from that originally presented to the version provided to Commissioners and the public last week.

I'd like to cite some examples of major issues raised by the citizen group, at our public hearing, and in correspondence, and describe their disposition.

- Storm water management. Where there had been a scheme for creating a detention pond offsite, the draft amendment now calls for storm water management to be done onsite.
- Site intensity and proximity to the metro station. This is a relatively large site (56 acres), some located within a ¼ mile of the metro station and some beyond. As conceived the original plan amendment proposal did not differentiate land within ¼ mile of the station and land beyond ¼ mile. Given that proximity to the metro station from a pedestrian's perspective is the primary consideration for the proposed plan amendment, it is appropriate to articulate in the Comprehensive Plan a division of the site into land bays for

the area closest to the Metro station, that is, within ¼ mile of it, and those further away. While the measure used to define intensity of use in the close-in “core area” is given in Floor Area Ratio or FAR, those portions of the site that are further away are designated in residential densities, with numbers of dwelling units per acre that are not widely different from the surrounding community. As we have done elsewhere in the Comprehensive Plan around other existing and future rail stations, this was done to help protect established neighborhoods around the site and temper possible expectations among nearby landowners that “core area” densities are appropriate outside of ¼ mile from the stations.

- Schools. Many who provided public input were concerned with the impact of development on the schools. The School Board Department of Facilities and Transportation Services has prepared a complete analysis of impact, including not only this proposal but the others which are approved in the Comprehensive Plan and/or are in the pipeline. The analysis shows that the schools can absorb the children from a development built to this plan.
- Roads. As a final example I call your attention to the proposed provisions for offsetting the impact of the density and intensity of the transit-oriented development on the local road network. Earlier text defined road improvements and gave a target for reducing impact by easing demand with a process called “Traffic Demand Management”, or TDM. Now, that TDM target is made high enough to achieve a significant local impact offset, coupled with the road improvements themselves, in terms of trip reduction in peak commuting hours. The trip reduction target is linked to planned density.

Besides the site specific considerations associated with this proposal, certain aspects of the proposal have implications beyond the site or the planning area. The Vienna Metro station is and will remain for some time a terminus of the Orange Line. Those driving to the station should and will continue to have access to Metro. The County should take an active part in

assuring such access. Metro itself needs continued County level attention as part of the region’s support of our heavy rail transit system. Efforts to ease congestion through traffic demand management at this site should be complemented by comparable efforts wherever opportunity presents across the County. I will offer follow-on motions on these issues as recommendations by the Planning Commission to the Board of Supervisors on these points tonight.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I move that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors approval of the out-of-turn amendment to the County Master Plan identified as SO2-II-V2 now dated October 7, 2004.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors that, as part of the overall review of the County Transportation Policy Plan, the following elements or tasks be included:

First, I move that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors that the County explore and implement any changes or additions to policy which support assurance that Metro will have the resources needed to operate, maintain and as necessary expand those facilities serving Fairfax County, with the objective of continued future underpinning of County Transit Station Area land use policies.

Second, I move that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors that the County devote particular emphasis to a review with the Virginia Department of Transportation of plans and priorities for road network improvements on all roads impacted by the implementation of Transit Station Area land use policies.

Third, I move that the County explore and implement any changes or additions to policy which will support the routine development and operation of robust and enforceable Traffic Demand Management programs at every opportunity across the County, covering not only employment centers but also dense residential districts, so that road improvements and Traffic Demand Management become co-equal transportation system management tools.

Fourth and finally, I move that the Planning Commission recommend to the Board of Supervisors that the County explore and implement any changes or additions to policy which will support continued future access to County Metro stations by commuters who do not live within walking distance but want to use Metro. Such measures might include not only provisions for the physical means of access but also for the public education and incentive programs required to help ensure their broadest use.